

*The Deadly Dust*¹

There's a new move in the government's continuing war against the sick and dying victims of industrial diseases, in particular the deadly asbestos-related variety. If you know any ex-workers on invalidity ask them to check their medical certificates. They might find they're no longer suffering from asbestosis: the authorities are trying to get it reclassified as C.O.A.D. (Chronic Obstruction of the Airways Disease).

C.O.A.D. is a non-specific description. Although it can refer to a respiratory disease caused by exposure to asbestos it can also mean you've got bronchitis or asthma or that you've been strangled by the next-door neighbour. It's a bit like having a broken leg and the doctor describing it as Chronic Obstruction of the Power to Walk. Okay it might mean your leg is broken but it means a hundred other things as well. It could even include some psychological disorders. And this suggests you might cure the respiratory problem yourself with a bit of time and effort: one subtle implication, that it's your own fault. It sounds far-fetched but many long-term asbestosis victims are actually told to visit a psychiatrist.

Obviously certain members of the medical profession are under orders from the government to further obscure the issue. They want to eradicate the direct link between asbestos and industrial disease altogether. The attempt to reclassify asbestosis as C.O.A.D. is another move in that direction. In a humane society they would try to eradicate the cause of the disease. But this is Britain, instead of doing that they try to get rid of the name by which the disease is known. And once they get rid of the name they'll say the disease itself doesn't exist.

Asbestos is not only highly dangerous it is ultimately fatal. It is an indestructible, natural fibre, which is why it is such a desirable commercial commodity. But because it's indestructible ALL the diseases related to it are 'indestructible' as well; in other

¹ published anonymously in BLOW OUT, the OILC newspaper in late 1991 or very early 1992

words they're incurable, they can only get worse: once you have an asbestos-related disease you never get better. It's important to grasp the significance of this point: if you have cancer caused by asbestos there's no point in receiving radiotherapy or chemotherapy. How can you 'treat' a cancer where the actual fibre present in your body and causing the cancer is indestructible? Nor can surgery remove 'it'. Yes there may be one fibre in your lung, but there may be a couple of million. In one well-known case where

a Pneumoconiosis Medical Panel post mortem found no asbestos bodies in the deceased's lungs...subsequent examination by electron microscopy revealed nearly 500 million fibres of white asbestos in one gram of lung tissue.

A large-scale research programme on asbestos-related disease is obviously one of the most fundamental requirements in our society. But nothing at all is happening. Young doctors are taught very little about it, which is why they fail to diagnose correctly; they persist in asking all the wrong questions when victims go to them for help. The last thing they want to find out is that the disease you suffer from is a result of the job you do. The government won't admit the need for such research because that would admit the scale of the problem. They won't even subsidise one solitary hospice for the thousands of people dying from the horrific effects of the disease. So instead of supporting the victims of asbestos they support the wealthy elite who profit by its use. Instead of campaigning against the asbestos industry the state campaigns on its behalf, engaging in a massive cover-up programme of sick propaganda and disinformation. At the heart of the operation is the Department of Social Security.

Here you have a state department which is supposed to exist to support those on the bottom rung of society: but instead of supporting them it makes their life a misery. Next to the DSS, the police and the military are like kindly old uncles and aunts. The DSS is the most ruthless and effective arm of state in the business.

There's a lot of media hype about "terrorism" these days but the DSS is the most efficient terrorist organisation in Britain. For the unlucky millions of disabled and other unemployed people the DSS exists only to threaten, punish and victimise. Their legal experts are paid to devise new bureaucratic methods of torturing the men and women no longer able to work because they've fallen victim to industrial disease. One of their primary tasks is to establish the criteria that will bar victims of asbestos from claiming disability benefit. This isn't done to save on giro payments. The money they do save

amounts to very little. In fact the government would be better off financially if they gave these disabled people their proper allowances. Just imagine the money they have to lay out in terms of man-hours, stationery and different technology; plus the cash payments for the countless medical and legal mercenaries they are forced to conscript. The war against victims of industrial disease provides a gravy train for all the doctors and lawyers and other so-called "experts" who get paid "consultancy fees" and "attendance allowance" to take part in all the Medical Boards and Benefit Appeals and the various Tribunals and Panels.

Once you examine this side of things you're forced to ask, why? Why does the British State act in such a costly, ruthlessly brutal manner towards its own people, in particular the sick and dying? It's too easy to blame "politics" and lay it at the door of the "class-war", accusing the government of being right-wing. Of course the government's 'right wing'. What government isn't? But it's dangerous to ignore the shoddy and frequently shameful part played by the official Labour Movement; the trades unions and the Labour Party itself. There's very big money at stake. Corruption might start at the top but it doesn't take long to reach the bottom.

The big asbestos corporations are fighting a rearguard battle throughout the world. In the USA they've taken a severe pounding from thousands of victims of asbestos who have successfully fought them for compensation. Countries like Sweden and Denmark have already banned the use of asbestos but reactionary governments in Canada, Britain and South Africa are going in the opposite direction. They aid and abet the asbestos industry, not just by protecting their immediate financial interests but by promoting their development both at home and especially abroad, in the Third World. It's like something out of a Stephen King horror story. The big corporations are actually being encouraged to mine asbestos in certain countries, knowing full well that the end result is misery and death, not just for the workers directly involved but for the hundreds of thousands of people who will come into contact with the deadly dust once the stuff is exported and manufactured. Cash profit is immediate; the horrific effects are long-term, and only affect the working population. The Houses of Parliament had all their asbestos removed a while ago.

There are at least two priorities on the asbestos industry's agenda: 1] Keep the public in the dark; 2] Make sure if compensation claims from dying workers have to be paid, that it is made as difficult as possible and that payments are kept to the absolute

minimum, no matter what it takes.

Compensation can't be left to the insurance companies who stopped insuring the major international corporations years ago. The risks were too great. The big companies must do it themselves. Last year Turner & Newalls set aside £11.4 million to pay off compensation claims, and a further who-knows-how-much to stop the figure going even higher. First of all these companies pay their tame lawyers and their tame doctors and their tame politicians to do everything they can to obstruct and delay the compensation procedure. The one thing they can't do is deny liability. Everybody knows they're guilty. That's why they avoid going the full legal distance. When forced to pay compensation they ALWAYS settle out-of-court. If not they stand the risk of being brought out into the full glare of the public notice, maybe forced to pay punitive damages as in the USA, maybe even charged with murder at some point in the future.

There is a very strong back-up service being provided by the DSS and it's crucial to recognise how it operates: no claimant will receive disability benefit unless being able to prove the disease they suffer from is an industrial disease. It isn't enough to prove you're suffering from an asbestos-related disease to qualify for disability benefit. You have to prove you caught the disease at your work.

And if you can't prove your entitlement to disability benefit from the DSS then you've got no chance of proving your entitlement to compensation from the big corporations. The one ALWAYS follows the other. The DSS ALWAYS acts on behalf of the asbestos industry and the multi-nationals in general. They do everything in their power to establish that the disease you have is "non-occupational" i.e. that it isn't an industrial disease at all. And you've got to prove them wrong. Whenever a disabled ex-worker tries to take on the major corporations for compensation the very first stage in the war is the fight with the DSS. In this respect our Department of Social Security is not so much a ruthless and brutal arm of state, it's an integral tool of the ruthless and brutal machine we call big business.

So what happens if you're an offshore or shipyard worker, or involved in the building game, when you know the industry you work in is saturated with the stuff; that it's odds-on to cause a progressive and probably fatal disease in those exposed to it for prolonged periods? And what happens if one of your mates has now been forced to quit, declared "unfit for work" because of some "mysterious" respiratory problem, somebody that's worked beside you for years and been exposed to the same deadly

dust as yourself?

Check it out with your health and safety reps. Unfortunately if you ask too many questions they'll brand you a trouble-maker and have you blacklisted. Go and you see your union officials, they'll hum and haw or else look embarrassed by their own inadequacy. Now try seeking medical or legal advice. If you do come across any knowledgeable and honest doctors or lawyers please contact this newspaper immediately.

Whatever you do, don't plead ignorance, the first step is facing the truth.